Progressive Engagement

Progressive Engagement *is an approach to helping households end their homelessness as rapidly as possible, despite barriers, with minimal financial and support resources. More supports are offered to those households who struggle to stabilize and cannot maintain their housing without assistance*.

Progressive engagement recognizes that there is no way to accurately predict how much help someone may need to end their homelessness and avoid a return to the streets or shelter. While we know that many people can successfully exit homelessness and avoid immediately returning with a small amount of assistance, we also know that there are no dependable predictors to guide the amount of assistance needed. In this approach, participants are initially offered "light-touch" assistance, including help creating a reasonable housing placement/stabilization plan, housing information and search assistance, and limited financial assistance for arrears, first month's rent, or security deposit. Programs using Progressive Engagement regularly re-assess housing barriers and seek to close cases as soon as housing retention barriers are resolved. Assistance is provided on an "as-needed basis" to keep a participant housed and, within funding constraints, programs offer more intensive support, additional rental assistance, or step-up referrals and help to access community-based assistance. This is a paradigm shift to providing services/case management to households experiencing homelessness and therefore, staff may need to be re-trained to be able to successfully make this change.

Rationale

Avoids false assumptions: people who are very poor and may be disabled – including those who score high on assessment tools – *do not all need or want* more intensive or longer-term assistance. People who initially appear to need more may end up needing less – and vis-versa.

Individualization: when a participant shows s/he needs more help, more help can be provided. Programs should offer the right amount of assistance for the right amount of time to meet individual needs.

Efficiency: by avoiding more assistance than is required to end homelessness and prevent an immediate return to streets or shelter, programs can help more people, close housing placement gaps, and reduce the time people remain homeless.

Effectiveness: rapid re-housing programs that use Progressive Engagement show high rates of success serving people with a wide range of needs. Programs take risks, frequently have to make tough decisions, and assume some will fail – meaning the program may need to do something different if they help the same participant again.

Keys to Success

Targeting

- ✓ Err on screening-in: screen-in every homeless Veteran except those able to exit *quickly* on own or with other assistance (e.g., with GPD assistance or through a readily available VASH voucher)
- ✓ Target Veterans across a range of needs, from those only needing "light touch" assistance to those who are eligible and waiting for permanent supportive housing (including VASH) who can be re-housed now with appropriate supports

Baseline Assessment & Initial Housing Plan

- ✓ Focus only on barriers directly related to obtaining/maintaining housing
- ✓ Plan should include short-term, actionable goals – accounting for limited ability to take action and make changes
- ✓ Periodically reassess barriers and plan progress and adjust plan, as needed

Individualized, Flexible Assistance

- ✓ Offer assistance in small amounts and short increments (e.g., move-in costs, first month rent, and weekly home visits for initial month once housed); increase or extend when needed
- ✓ Ensure the program is capable of providing flexible assistance: providing as little (e.g., housing search assistance, mediation) ***OR*** as much support as needed, desired, and allowed by funders to obtain/maintain housing
- ✓ Conduct regular case reviews to ensure housing plan progress, review needs, obtain consent for additional assistance, share lessons and build team competencies, and celebrate successes

Housing & Service Partnerships

- ✓ Build a broad array of landlord and service partners to support participants, increase choice, and limit the amount and duration of program assistance needed
- ✓ Establish clear referral processes and "warm handoffs" to ensure seamless transitions to non-crisis services

Case Closure

- ✓ Have clear criteria for staff to know when the crisis is resolved and initial housing stabilization goals are met
- ✓ Ensure participants have a "Plan A" to increase stability and access community-based supports and a "Plan B" to avoid future housing crises and a return to homelessness – what to do, resources available, how to access

Program Policies, Procedures, and Quality Improvement

- ✓ Ensure policies and procedures support progressive engagement practices
- ✓ Provide staff with the training and support needed to be comfortable, confident and successful
- ✓ Regularly review practices, program outputs and outcomes, and make improvements